

Writing Pedagogy: Learning Goals, Assignment Formats and Assignment Prompts

In this final workshop on writing pedagogy we explore assignment formats and learning goals and devise an ideal assignment prompt to 'think on paper' our own pedagogic preferences.

Keeping the audience and purpose in mind is essential for any writing. While writing papers for classes, Professors are primary audience for students, often Professors will encourage us to think outside the box and imagine broader audiences. The task then is to balance the various aspects of the assignment and show proficiency in content, development in style and diligence in argument. Spelling and grammar checks are critical!

Modes of writing:

1. Description tells how something looks, feels, sounds, smells, or tastes. It appeals directly to the senses.
2. Narration is storytelling. It shows or tells “what happened” and focuses on events, actions, adventures; and the narrator’s response to them.
3. Exposition, the bulk of college writing, is informative writing. It explains by giving examples; classifying; telling us how something works; comparing and contrasting; or analyzing causes and effects.
4. Argument is writing that makes a claim, advises, or moves the reader to action. All writing aims to present an argument to convince readers that the writer deserves to be heard. Argument is typically supported by evidence.

Needless to say, none of these is exclusive in any writing. Depending on the type and level of assignments and progression in student skills, writing an assignment requires a mix of modes.

Task 1: What is your preferred mix of modes when writing? Is there a particular mode of writing you feel most comfortable with? What exposition modes would you like students to develop in a course you were teaching?

The Writing Process—Basic pointers for students

- Writing is not linear: planning, drafting and revising are integral parts of the writing process!
- Planning for an assignment involves thinking about its purpose, audience, deadline and required research (which often takes much longer than the actual writing!)
 - a. What is your reason for writing?
 - b. Who is going to read what you say?
 - c. How much does the audience already know about your subject?
 - d. What should you keep in mind about the background of your audience?
- What is your subject, or broad field of inquiry? What is your topic, or specific area within the field?
- What are the key terms in the assignment that help you break down your task? Does it ask you to describe, define, analyze, compare and contrast, evaluate and/ or argue?
- Consider the main point you want to make—what is your thesis? A good thesis statement tells the reader what your topic is and makes an interesting claim about it that opens further discussion. It helps to set out the rest of the essay and organize your facts, analysis and argument.
- Based on the key terms of the assignment, what modes of writing will help you best support your thesis?

Introduction

1. Start with a quotation or dialogue.
2. Place your subject in historical context.
3. Open with an anecdote.
4. Shock or provoke the reader—mildly.
5. Start with a question.

Body

6. Offer evidence to support your thesis—use relevant examples, facts and figures, expert testimony and/ or personal experience.

Conclusion

7. Restate your main point.
8. End with a recommendation.
9. Show broader significance of your argument.

Assignment Formats

1. Summary Essay
2. Expository Essay
3. Compare and Contrast Essay
4. Research Paper
5. Letter

Task Two: Read the New York Times letter provided. If you were to assign this letter in a course you were teaching what would the learning goals for the students be?

Task Three: Based on specific learning goals decide what assignment format would best help students get the learning outcome you desire. Now, develop and assignment prompt based on these goals and format.

¹ Materials adapted from Cooley 2010.

References:

Cooley, Thomas. 2010. *The Norton Sampler: Short Essays for Composition*. New York: W. W. Norton Company, Inc.